

Testimony for March 8, 2016  
The Campaign for Paid Family Leave  
Senate Bill 221

My name is Sarah Winiarski, I was born and raised in Connecticut and I want to share my family's story in support of Senate Bill 221.

I consider us one of the lucky ones, my husband and I both are both employed, educated, professionals; earning enough to get by. When on FMLA with my first daughter, I had the luxury of paid leave through my employer's policy which allowed employees to donate sick time to each other. As a new working mom and having to hand my baby over to day care after 12 weeks to return to work, it made it a little easier. I felt valued, my coworkers cared about me enough to want me to enjoy time with my newborn without having to stress about the financial burden of not being paid for 12 weeks. The first 5 weeks were my sick and vacation time, which I had built up and had to use before I could access my donated time.

Fast forward 2 years, my company took away the policy allowing us to donate sick time and all the time I had built up was 5 weeks of sick and vacation time. Although my husband and I made the decision for me to take 12 weeks, we knew it would be a financial hit, but didn't realize the last impact it would have on our finances. I have been back to work for 6 months and we are still living pay check to pay check. With a second child, your living costs increase- day care, food, clothing, medical payments, etc. Had I been paid for my full leave time, we would not have had to dip into our stocks or borrow money from our daughter's bank accounts to simply pay our monthly bills. Had I been paid for my leave, we would be living a little bit more comfortably.

But as I said, I consider ourselves one of the lucky families because I could take the amount of time I needed although we're just getting by. My brother and his wife recently had their first baby, my brother had to go back to work 2 days later. He has not had the proper time to spend bonding with his son, helping his wife, and taking time to take care of his newly expanding family. There are moms in our state who go back to work one a few short weeks having giving birth, there are cancer patients who return to work the day after their chemo treatments, there are family members who spend their nights taking care of elderly parents and return to work the next morning.

Where is the support for these families? Connecticut has been on the forefront of paid leave for employees, let's be an example for our country. At no cost for employers, our workforce can have access to paid family leave, which will result in happier and more productive employees. I know from my experience I would have been much happier to return to work after my second child had I had the extra support.

Please support Senate Bill 221, it's a life changing bill that affects all Connecticut residents.